Grand Ave. new home of an instant building in West Town

By: Elaine Coorens

Had the weather been more cooperative, there would have been an 8,000 square foot building sitting there by nightfall.

As it was, the building wasn't completed until Wednesday.

Concrete on a steel mesh, the 50,000 pound panels began rolling in on flatbed rigs around 9:30 a.m. to a small group of observers who were attempting to avoid freezing appendages. Dan Staackmann, the property owner and head of Upton's Naturals, currently located in the 1900 block of west Fulton, was joined by his second-in-command Nicole Sopko and three architects from UrbanLab. Architect Sarah Dunn explained that she, Martin Felsen and Jeffery Macias were anxiously awaiting the panels because it is their first pre-fabricated structure.

"Those from Summit (Summit + Build, LLC., contractors) have done many of these so it is just another day for them, but we are excited," said Dunn.

Over the course of the day the DuKane fabricated panels came in from near Aurora on 10 separate trucks. Unfortunately they were challenged by the weather, making it impossible for them to get more than 10
panels in place. By end of day, from the east of Hoyne on Grand Avenues, there appeared to have a massive gray three-story structure with the window sized holes in the façade, when in fact, less then half of the building was completed by late Tuesday.

Knowing that they were going to need more physical space for Upton's Naturals, Staackmann began looking for existing space over a year ago. Spaces just did not seem adequate for one reason or another.

Then he located the property on Grand, which was foreclosed on by the bank. As he worked with the bank, he connected with the architectural firm UrbanLab.

The building will not be ready for occupancy until sometime in June or July according to the architects.

However, once in place, they are planning to add to their 13 person team. Expansion plans include 5 to 10 in a café and additional staff in the production area.

They produce several different products but the base of their offerings is Seitan. Seitan is wheat gluten and an alternative for soy-based meat substitutes. Their largest retailer is Whole Foods but Jewel foods and smaller establishments like the Green Grocer also purchase their products. According to Staackmann they currently produce between 1,000 to 2,000 pounds of Seitan daily, five days a week.